Fifteen hundred inhabitants of the province of Thua-Tien -- a majority of whom are Catholics-- were deported and sent to Con-Son during the month of April 1972 (le Monde, January 10, 1973: statement made by Ngo Cong Duc).

There have been massive deportations of Buddhists, intellectuals and students from Hue in the direction of Con-Son, all without trial, and in May, 400 to 500 arrests per week, according to the letter sent out by the Association of Vietnamese Patriots in Canada (late October 1972).

In general nothing is known about the persons who have disappeared; when members of the family inquire at the police station they are invariably sent to another service which again can provide no information. In this way the multiplicity of police services is used to cover up the repression and reinforce the secrecy surrounding it.

**Repression which is above all political and directed against the «opposition»**

But although repression is omnipresent, it is also selective. Population Control alone is insufficient, for Thieu must face up to real opposition movements which have developed and spread to new social strata, particularly since the 1968 Têt offensive. Today the people who are objects of repression are highschool pupils and students who refuse compulsory conscription, Buddhists, Catholics -- the latter were once strong supporters of the régime, but are now largely in the opposition -- intellectuals, teachers, lawyers, and also politicians; the latter in fact are joining the opposition in increasingly large numbers. Arrests among these categories have become even more massive since the electoral farce of October 1971, when Thieu's lone candidature for the presidency remained undisputed. When the NLF offensive started in the Spring of 1972, and after the parliament voted to grant the government «special powers», arrest among these categories became systematic.

- **The Buddhists**: all the leaders among the Buddhist nuns, of the Long Hoa Buddhists of the Buddhist Union of Female Civil Servants and Employees, and of the Hong Mon Buddhist Church, are in prison. In May 1972, after arresting the leaders of the Van Hanh Buddhist University Association, the police bulldozed its premises. At the same time many Buddhist students in Hué were arrested and with them, two leading monks. They are still in prison today. One of these students, Nguyen Ngoc Phuong, died in prison on January 5, 1973.

- **The students**: they are arrested in their homes, in the University, on the street; many are immediately sent into the army, which thus serves as a prison camp and cemetery for members of the opposition. Even schoolchildren are not spared and, in April 1972, in Dalat. 150 students and highschool pupils were put in prison. In May there were massive arrests of students in Saigon and Da Nang, where the entire Standing Committee of the General Assembly of Highschool Students was arrested; also arrested in May were the members of the Student Committee for the People's Right to Live. On May 23 the police stormed the *Cité Universitaire* in Saigon, where the students were demonstrating in favor of peace: 170 of them were arrested and taken away to an unknown destination.
Again in May the office of the General Student Assembly in Hué was attacked by the police. A pamphlet entitled *High School and University Students in Prison* provides an (incomplete) list of young detainees in Chi Hoa, also the date and place of their arrest. Some were arrested individually, on the word of informers, but the great majority were arrested during police round-ups.

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**The Catholics:** On April 30, in the middle of the night, the Saigon police invaded the premises of the young Catholic Workers' Association; the 15 persons present, including 3 chaplains and the president of the organization, Nguyen Viet Tan, were arrested. Since then, the premises of the YCWA have been guarded night and day by the police. All the leaders of the YCWA, of the Catholic Movement for Peace, and of the League of Catholic Students, are in prison.

The police have also arrested all the members of the mass movements and numerous humanitarian associations that have sprung up in the South to combat the many infringements of the most elementary human rights. The leaders of the Private Education Union, the Union of Saigon Market Tradesmen as well as the Union of Vietnamese Railway Workers, are all in prison. There are also: the leaders of the Union of Vietnamese Women, of the Peasant Movement for the Right to Life, of the Association of Mothers of Prisoners, of the Popular Front for Peace Action, whose co-president, Tran Than Nham, a Catholic refugee from the North, who is an opponent of the Thieu régime and was a candidate for Parliament in 1971, was arrested by the security forces on May 7, 1972. The majority of the members of the Committee for Reform of the Penitentiary System in South Vietnam are in prison. The committee has had to abandon all its activities, its review (*Prison Lao Tu*) has had to cease publication, the hostel for released prisoners has been closed.

There was speculation as to whether the role of the U.S. puppet police apparatus would decrease after the signing of the Accords: It was generally thought however that, on the contrary, it would increase: that the burden of «pacification» would no doubt fall to this police apparatus which would replace the B52s to eliminate the NLF and silence the population. (At the present writing, May 1973, this prediction appears to have been more than justified).
Between the French colonial occupation and the neo-colonial dictatorship imported by the U.S.A., South Vietnam has become an immense prison; an immense concentration camp echoing with the screams of prisoners, of people who have been beaten and tortured. Ill-treatment and torture are the corner-stone of the Saigon detention system. From the moment the prisoner walks through the prison doors, or into the camp, or simply into one of the hundreds of police stations that dot the countryside of the «democratic» South, he is aware of being enveloped by a heavy mantle of silence; the silence of hell, consciously organized, in which nothing that might contribute to his physical and moral destruction has been left to chance.

Survivors of the Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War have often explained that the physical beatings they received only accounted for a part of the sub-human treatment to which they were subjected. Quite as terrible, if not more so, were the attempts at systematic destruction of the individual, the efforts totally to annihilate his personality. In Vietnam too, if the aim of the U.S. has been to bomb the land «back to the Stone Age», it has also been to reduce its inhabitants to the animal level.
But the leaden cover has occasionally been raised; the cries have been heard through the bars, and testimony abounds as to the nature of this system, this pillar of the Saigon puppet régime. This testimony is overwhelming, copious, irrefutable. For some years now it has been well known outside Vietnam, the international press, including the U.S. press, has given it frank if uneven coverage. It tells of the terrible oppression of hundreds of thousands of prisoners, but also of their hopes, their struggles, carried on with indomitable courage in the face of their oppressors. We have put together certain elements of this testimony, that emanate from people representing the entire gamut of political and religious beliefs: communists, neutralists (whose very existence Thieu denies by systematically locking them up), Catholics, etc...

THE FIRST OPPRESSOR: FRENCH COLONIALISM

Police terror, arbitrary arrest, inhuman conditions, did not begin with the arrival of 500,000 G I's on Vietnamese soil; nor was it the bloody dictatorship of Ngo Dinh Diem that inaugurated them. The trend was set under French occupation, even if since then «progress» has brought about further perfection in terms of repressive methods.

A builder of prisons

The main South Vietnamese prisons were built during French occupation between the two World Wars. They were:

in Tonkin: Thai Nguyen, Cao Bang, Ha Grang, Lai Chau, Con Lon, Son La;

in Annam: Lao Bas, Bam Mathnet, Kontum;

in Cochin China: Poulo-Condor, which is a hell-on-earth that we shall describe further on, where repression was particularly severe during the 1930-1935 period, and through which passed practically all of the Vietnamese revolutionary leaders (Le Duan, Pham Hung, etc.) In addition to inhuman work-details (for instance being forced to gather coral underwater until utter exhaustion set in), and the daily beatings, one must reckon with disease. During the French occupation, 75 percent of the prisoners suffered from tuberculosis, and a sizeable percentage came down with malaria. To fill in the health picture we should mention malnutrition (the diet consisted of red rice and rotten dried fish) and the absence of any hospital facilities whatsoever, beyond a tiny dispensary.

Of the more than 300 political prisoners interned in a compound in the heart of Poulo-Condor, supposedly the healthiest part of the island, some 30 died in 1931 alone.
But Poulo-Condor is not an isolated case.

In the Hanoi prison «one was greeted by a scene of indescribable confusion: some fifty political prisoners mixed with common criminals imprisoned for a great variety of crimes, together with minors, and in the midst of all this there appeared twelve women carrying young babies» (Report filed by Inspector Chastenet de Géry while on mission for Inspector General of the Colonies Demougin).

A generalized system

These are not isolated examples, nor are they occasional lapses in the system that could probably be remedied. The penitentiary system is an integral part of colonialism, as witness this declaration commending torture from the *Indo-Chinese Dispatch* of June 16, 1930:

«To destroy communism in this country, there is only one method and that is, terror. By terror we can bring the peasants to heel; by terror we can put a stop to the disastrous effects of the campaign waged by manipulators and agitators sowing discord... We should round up all the people who paste posters on the walls or distribute leaflets, and introduce them to the thumbscrew as well as to the whole gamut of tortures that will cure them for all time. That she-devil who led the dance at Due Hoa would be more quickly rid of her hysteria after a month’s torture, than after four years of prison. Physical punishment, torture, brutal handling, are the only treatment that will force the masses foolish enough to be misled by agitators to understand that we too can be pitiless in our reprisals and that we will have the final say.»

The entire system of colonial occupation is founded on prisons and jails, synonyms for torture and degradation.

The organized nature of the degradation is clearly evident in the petitions and complaints which the political prisoners addressed in 1939 to a journalist whom they mistakenly took for a representative of the Popular Front (the advent of the Popular Front had rekindled the hopes of many Vietnamese militants, and it did, in fact, bring about a certain liberalization of the prison régime):

«...We have been fed meat from cattle whose intestines and liver were infected by worms.

«The meat of two pigs was handed out; one pig’s foot was eaten by germs, while the other had putrefied lungs.

«When these facts were reported to the prison director, he replied: they can eat it.

«All our best greetings. Long live the Popular Front.»

«A certain dispensary attendant gives the same syrup to all the sick people, so as not to have to bother to prepare any other medicines. He says that syrup has never hurt anyone:
"In the leprosy clinic they wait until one of the diseased persons dies before distributing a half-can of milk to the survivors.

"Tell that to the Popular Front...."

"... At Poulo-Condor they work you to death.

"For instance: the prisoners assigned to digging stones from the sea (San Ho) must work from three in the afternoon to eight in the evening, during the monsoon season.

"One prisoner, unable to stand it any longer, committed suicide in the presence of the director.

"Prisoners are still forced to go on wood chopping details, even though this work has been assigned to a special squad.

"Having been oppressed to the very limit of endurance by the preceding government, we would be glad if the incoming régime were to decide on a change of policy."

(Quoted in Les Secrets de Poulo-Condor, by J.C. Demariaux, 1956)

Thus the foundations of the present penitentiary system in South Vietnam were laid by French colonialism. Many prisoners have, in fact, served time under different régimes in the same prisons. For instance, Nguyen Duc Thuan who was left to moulder in Poulo-Condor under the French occupation, lived to experience the joy of liberation during the Revolution of 1945 (the red flag with its gold star hoisted above the prison), only to spend another eight years in the same jail under Ngo Dinh Diem. The fact that prison conditions have worsened since the French period can hardly be considered a retrospective justification: the system of oppression that reigns unchecked today was deliberately implanted under French colonial occupation.

A LIVING HELL

The physical punishment, mistreatment and torture to which prisoners in the Saigon jails and concentration camps are now subjected constitute a whole; they cannot be considered as exceptions, any more than they were during French occupation. They are the general, permanent rule, inscribed in the very logic of the penitentiary system.

- Malnutrition and illness

Wherever you go, malnutrition is the chief complaint. According to the most recent evidence, the daily rice ration at Poulo-Condor, and elsewhere, is being constantly reduced, and it now consists of about 400 grammes of cooked rice per day. This rice, which has been rinsed in sea-water to soften it, is then mixed with sand or plastic pellets that can perforate the digestive tract. Each prisoner is also given a pinch of salt, a ludicrous pinch of salt. This salt ration, even though it is constantly being reduced and...
only given irregularly, is vital. For it is the salt that permits the prisoner, after long torture sessions, to survive, or at least to vegetate, until the next one. The grain of salt becomes as precious as the urine which, in the absence of all medication, is applied as a rudimentary form of first aid to heal open wounds.

Food is distributed by «Kapos» (trusties), who are common criminals pressed into service by the administration in imitation of Nazi methods. These men, who serve the food mixed with dirty water, know that they are judged by the guards according to the amount of this water they serve at a meal; if they hand out a bowl with only a little in it, this is a way of saying: «I am on the «communist» prisoner's side»; whereas if they pour in a lot of dirty water, this is a way of saying: «I know how to make them change their minds». If they are lucky, the prisoners are not given as their daily water ration (a few swallows only) tainted water from the notorious Poulo-Condor well. Needless to say, there are no vegetables, and of course no meat.

This diet hardly enough to keep the prisoner alive, contributes to the proliferation of disease. Dysentery is common, as is tuberculosis and there is no hospital worth mentioning. When the sick arrive at the dispensary they are given one or two pills, whatever their symptoms. These pills, more often than not, only hasten the course of the illness, and frequently the patient survives only a few days longer. The dispensary is just another death instrument in the hands of the executioners.

On Phu Quoc island, prisoners who demanded better rations were several times answered by machine-gun fire. As soon as the protests began, jeeps mounted with automatic weapons were rolled out and started firing at a set level that was gradually lowered so as to force the prisoners into a stooping position. On each occasion this operation resulted in dozens of dead and wounded. (Testimony furnished by J.-P. Debris and A. Menras).

Contempt for human dignity

But most of the time death does not follow so rapidly. It is a slow process due to malnutrition, year-long lack of fresh air and sunlight, for prisoners crowded by the dozen into a few cubic feet, without ventilation, without the most primitive sanitary facilities. Disease takes its toll, and to top it all, the constant torture to make you confess (at times you don't even know what), to force you to abandon all political convictions that differ from those of the Saigon dictators; or again, simply to give pleasure to the torturers. There is abundant testimony as regards their ingenuity. Torture sessions are conducted according to a set plan. The prisoner must be gradually weakened until he breaks down. From time to time a halt is called to allow him to recover; if necessary he will even be given a booster injection after one torture session, to keep him alive to face the next ones. The prisoner must not die right away. He must be made to live through the process of humiliation, lose control of his most elementary reflexes, cast off the last shred of human dignity, and accept the slightest whim of his captors.

To start with, he must accept the Saigon régime. From Diem to Thieu, the demands insisted on by the United States hirelings have not varied: prisoners must pledge obedience
to the Saigon régime as the only legitimate government, sign acts of accusation against the revolutionary fighters, or simply salute the three-stripped flag, symbol of the Saigon puppet régime. (They imprisoned the brother of Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, the PRG Minister of Foreign Affairs, and tortured him for long periods, but he refused to sign a declaration denouncing his sister).

Saluting the Saigon flag, seemingly a harmless enough gesture (what could be a simpler way of escaping torture?), is the first act required. From the testimony of imprisoned militants we know of the terrible debate that can rage in the heart of these men, who have already reached the limit of human endurance. But accepting to salute this bit of cloth is not simply a tactical concession, it is the first step in a process of total denial. Once accomplished, the prisoner is not left to himself; every day new, more humiliating demands are made (he must help the officers and Kapos convince recalcitrant prisoners who have not yet given in, take part in the enemy's psychological propaganda, etc.) Retraction of his opinions becomes an obsession for the prisoner. No methods are barred, from the most brutal to the most insidiously «gentle» barbaric torture (to which we will return) combined with exhausting psychological warfare. Interminable lectures, public address systems that spew forth the same slogans day after day, night after night, followed by brief periods of improved treatment; then renewed horror, simulated execution, division into small groups in order to sap prisoner morale, or simply solitary confinement. etc.

Methods of torture

There has been ample testimony, especially in the last few years, concerning methods of torture, strictly speaking. The evidence we present here has been collected by Catholics from the South, by the Unified Buddhist Congregation in Paris, or related in a public meeting by two French «exchange» teachers, J.-P. Debris and A. Menras, who spent more than two years in Thieu's jails for having raised the flag of the National Liberation Front in Saigon. From these few examples, it will be seen that in some respects the camps and prisons of the Nazi Gestapo have been greatly «improved» upon.

One example: the prisoner is made to stand naked on a stool surrounded by electric projectors of 200 to 500 watts, or against a wall with a 500-watt lamp placed 14 inches in back of his head. He must keep this position for several days -- interrupted or not, as the case may be, by brief intervals to recover or be fed. Certain prisoners can endure as much as a week of this treatment before collapsing. But it takes weeks to recover, and a good number of totally exhausted victims never recover.

Other examples: 1) the prisoner's hands are placed, palm up, on a table. They are struck 50 times with a wooden bat, which turns them black. The fingers swell so much that the prisoner cannot hold a bowl of food in his hands for a week, or even longer. During this torture, the table is usually shattered, so that the prisoner's hands are also full of splinters.

2) The prisoner is stretched out on his stomach, his knees tied so that his feet stick up in the air. The soles of his feet are then beaten with enormous
blackjacks, thus causing suffering in three places: feet, knees and heart, as the blood rushes suddenly into his body.

3) The prisoner's hands are tied behind his back, so that his chest is made to stick out. Blows administered with a rubber blackjack make him spit blood and defecate. Those who are subjected to this torture generally have damaged lungs for life.

4) The prisoner is forced to hold his hands in the form of a cup while pins are driven under his fingernails. Certain prisoners can stand as many as ten pins in their fingers, yet say nothing; they are perhaps innocent and have no information to give. A more «exquisite» variation of this torture consists in attaching a feather to the pin, which is driven under the nail up to half its length. A ventilator is then turned on to make the pin, which moves with the feather, turn violently in the wound.

5) Nails may be driven into a prisoner's knee-cap, or anklebone. They are often left there for several days.

6) A prisoner is stretched out on his back on a bench, his hands are tied together by the wrists, his head tilted backward. Very salty, or very soapy, dirty water is introduced into his nose and mouth until he loses consciousness. Sometimes, if the water enters the lungs, the prisoner may die. But this is a relatively rare occurrence. All of these forms of torture are administered by «specialists» who know from experience the limits of human endurance, and therefore exactly when it is necessary to stop. They then cover the man's mouth with a dirty cloth and by hitting him on the ribs, provoke vomiting of the liquid. However, the vomit does not come out through the mouth, which is gagged, but through the nose. The «specialists» call this the «submarine trip».

7) After being tightly tied to a chair, the prisoner receives drop-by-drop on his head, the contents of a pitcher of ice-water. The effect is such that after about three hours, each drop is sensed as though it were a blow from a hammer.

The punching-ball and the airplane trip

8) This is a form of torture that leaves much less visible traces, but is in fact more deadly. The victim, bound hand and foot, is put inside a large barrel filled with water up to his neck. Police armed with wooden bats strike at random against the sides of this metal container. The liquid communicates these blows not only to the outside of the body, but even more so to the inside, thus affecting the viscera as well as the liver, the heart, and the kidneys. Those who undergo this form of torture several times inevitably suffer the after-effects for the rest of their lives. This is called the «punching-ball».

9) The «airplane trip» should also be mentioned. While suspended by a thin wire attached to his big toe, the prisoner is boxed by four men as if he were a punching-bag. He may also be attached to his wrists, behind his back, and made to swing to and fro; blows with a blackjack and burns on the most sensitive parts of the body (especially on the genitals) then follow. The girl student Gian Thi Hue, who underwent this torture three times in succession, cannot move the joints of her upper limbs. For another student, whose case was described by Debris and Menras, the results, though different, were equally tragic: after undergoing practically every kind of torture, out of fear that he might give in and sign the proposed document, he several times tried to commit suicide; he first slashed his veins while in his cell, but his blood trickled under the door and
he was "saved" by the Kapos. He made several further attempts, by biting his own tongue and beating his head against the wall of his cell, but they too were unsuccessful.

Oil and electricity

10) At Phu Quoc, prisoners are frequently seated on a stool with a hole in it, underneath which is placed a lighted oil-lamp. Then, if the prisoner does not talk, the flame is gradually turned higher until it burns his anus. Approximately 75 percent of the prisoners tortured in this way die. Some could be saved, however, if an abdominal operation could be performed, that would allow the bowels to function.

11) An electric shock of 12 volts is given the prisoner, who is attached to a hand generator by the thumbs, the big toes, and often, in the case of men, by the genitals (If the victim is a woman, she is attached to the machine by her breasts.) A person who has a weak heart can die at the first shock. All torture chambers are equipped with a generator of this type, a machine that resembles a square pepper-mill.

Women

Special forms of torture exist for women. Usually, young "communist" passant women and girl students are systematically raped. One girl said that a torturer had inserted a live eel into her vagina, after having done the same with soft-drink bottles that had been previously well-shaken. She also told how lizards had been turned loose on her naked body, and recalled burns on her breasts. At first she had tried to hide these things from her family, then she too attempted suicide. Today she has been removed to another prison... At Thu Doc, on August 21, 1969, a 16 year old girl, Dan Thi Tanh, and a 41 year old woman, Nguyen Thi Tanh, died under torture inflicted on the orders of the prison director, Duong Ngoc Minh.

Recently students and high-school pupils

Recently the young, particularly students, have been singled out for repression and there are thousands of them in the prisons of South Vietnam. Here is a short list of examples:

A girl student named Nguyen Thi Yen, arrested June 8, 1972, was beaten until she lost consciousness; she was then forced to remain standing unclothed in the presence of ten torturers, during which time the nipples of her breasts were burned with lighted cigarettes.
A student named Trinh Dinh Ban, president of the Federation of South Vietnamese Students, was beaten in the face, which caused considerable swelling; his eyes were injured and infected, and he no longer can see clearly. He also had his fingers pierced by needles, was struck on the chest and on the soles of his feet, with the result that at present he cannot move.

A girl student named Vo Thi Bach Tuyet, member of the Committee for the People's Right to Live, was beaten during several successive weeks, then hung by her feet with another student, in a cell lighted by a glaring floodlight. Mice and ants were turned loose on her body, and she was finally placed in a cell that was deep in water.

A student named Nguyen Van Nam, a member of the same committee, was subjected to the same treatment as Trinh Dinh Ban. In addition, he has undergone electroshock, has had his fingers beaten with sticks, with the result that they are now paralyzed.

A girl student named Nguyen Thi Hue, president of the Saigon Association of Buddhist students, received injections of chemical substances (truth serum?) for several days; she was then forced to sign a confession.

Fifteen-year-old high-school students have been arrested for participating in the movement of organized attacks against American cars which refused to display the peace sign showing a broken rifle. One boy was condemned to 20 years of forced labor and to ten years' banishment from the capital. He is presently in the Dalat re-education center for minors.

All of this information has been corroborated by the declarations of a Saigon Judge, Mr. Tran Thuc Linh, who visited these establishments and called attention to their illegality, even in the context of the Saigon decrees .......

Poulo-Condor, still the same

There are also certain cases of deportation. On May 7, 1972, a boat left Hué the capital of Central Vietnam; on board there were 1012 men, women, old people and children (some young babies) being taken to Poulo-Condor. Among all of these people, only 143 had been granted the «right» to trial; the others had simply been hastily rounded up and deported. Some ten days later, a second boat left Da Nang for the same destination, carrying an as yet unknown number of persons. Mass deportations of this type are still extremely frequent.

Poulo-Condor is spoken of with terror even in other prisons, such as Chi Hoa(Saigon) in which the two French coopérants mentioned earlier, were imprisoned. Their testimony is invaluable:
«Among them there were old people, sick people, people with tuberculosis, some paralyzed; anyone can see what deportation meant for them. It meant isolation and death. So their friends, their cell-mates (at Chi Hoa), who still had their health and strength, decided to resist this deportation... to prevent their friends from being sent away to certain death. For this reason, they barricaded themselves inside their cells... When they began to resist, the Kapos went into the courtyards, formed in line and began hurling vomit and tear-gas grenades; 80 grenades were thrown into one cell that contained 78 prisoners, burning their skin, which soon hung in ribbons. The Kapos then rushed into the cells and after beating the prisoners, dragged them by the feet into the yard, where covered army trucks were waiting. The prisoners' unconscious bodies were thrown like so many animal carcasses into the trucks, where they were numbered and tied to one another .... The next thing is a reception committee «welcoming» them to Paulo-Condor, where the prisoners must pass through a double line of Kapos armed with blackjacks, who hit them with all their might. This is followed by a thorough search of each prisoner (which is always humiliating). Any small parcel the prisoner may have managed to keep with him, containing perhaps a few items of clothing, is confiscated: the rules say «no personal effects». Then, still along the same lines, there is the reception by the head «specialist», who says: «The authorities here will be very nice to you, only you must show your good will. You must agree to be re-educated, you must salute this flag. Otherwise, don’t forget that here we are on an island, cut off from the rest of the world; however loudly you scream, no-one will hear you. And don’t forget either that when one of you dies, it’s just a matter of filling in a simple form....»

One prisoner described to us how the ones who are given no vegetables crawled out to a nearby lawn to eat the grass. He said that the Kapos beat them for this, put up barbed wire fences and finally dug up the lawn.... He also told us what the head «specialist» said to him: «That grass is the property of the Saigon government. You are rebels and communists; you refuse to salute the Saigon flag. You have no right to that grass. For all we care, you can die.»

Tiger cages: a long-standing tradition in Poulo-Condor

«We next found ourselves in front of the row of tiger-cages: a long veranda, huge pillars, tar-coated iron doors that clang open and shut. The lower part of the high walls was also covered with tar....

«This was the beginning of my internment in the tiger-cages .........

«It was the first time that I had been able to take a good look at the cage. It was a cell alright, but a very special sort of cell; I shall say why. Just inside the door was the slop-bucket, and some 2 feet away from the door was a wooden bunk a foot high, 6 feet long and 4 feet wide, the same width as the cage. The stone walls were nearly 3 feet thick... The ceiling consisted of twenty bars, laid crosswise, one every ten inches or so. There were two rows of these cages on the island, each one divided lengthwise by a 3 foot thick wall, forming two lines of 30 cages, set back to back and looking out on verandas facing in opposite directions. The top of the central wall, and the walls that separated
the cages, were used to walk on by the guards, who could thus look down into the dark
cages and see the prisoners, with their unkempt hair and beards, crawling about or dropp-
ing down exhausted, like caged animals.

"A specific feature of the tiger-cages is that the prisoners who occupy them lose all semblance of freedom. All other types of cells, prisons or dungeons are nothing compared to the tiger-cages. Normally, once the door has closed on a prisoner, the cell belongs to him. It may be filled with suffering and death -- and even in this respect it cannot compete with the tiger-cages -- but at least it belongs to the occupant. It's all he has. In other words, a prisoner still has the possibility of living "privately". But the tiger-cages leave you no freedom whatsoever. Day and night you live under the enemy's gaze. He is constantly, walking along the top of the wall, looking down at you through the bars. No prisoner can ever feel that he is alone. This creates a terrifying psychological condition: you have to be constantly on your guard, constantly expecting the worst, expecting some blunt object to strike you on the head: a stone, a stick hurled full force, or even a lighted cigarette butt......

"In an ordinary cell, when you've been put through the third degree, you're nevertheless left alone; you can groan, rub yourself, eat or drink. Here they beat you until you spit blood, then throw you back in, and you have to lie still, in the position you fell in, without giving any sign of life until the next day. Because they're up there all the time, spying on you; and if you make the slightest move, they yell: "He's still alive, he can take more, we can keep it up.." If you're hungry, you have to wait until they've all left before you touch any food. If they come back while you're eating, you have to swallow anything you may have in your mouth without moving your lips. If you groan, (and groaning gives a certain relief) they're back immediately: silence... If you want to keep a bit of rice for a friend who has been beaten, even if it's a ball no bigger than an egg, you have to pretend to spill it by mistake on your bunk, then lie on it, and later pick up the grains one by one and hide them inside your belt, until everybody has gone to bed, before you hand it over.

(Nguyen Duc Thuan, in Indomptable Hanoi, 1972)

In the following passage, the same author gives an eye-witness account of food distribution in the tiger-cages: "Food and water were left at one end of the long row of cages. You had to run as fast as you could to get there. Generally the torturers would hide behind doors or pillars, then spring out suddenly and hit you in the chest with their knees.....

"So you had to run for all you were worth, and try to work out a techni-
que for managing, at the same time, to jam several old powdered-milk boxes filled with
water under your arms, and in your hands hold a towel or a shirt-tail with rice in it, running
with your head down at full speed, without losing a drop of water or a grain of rice. You
had to be careful not to lose anything, even when they jumped out at you and knock-
ed you down. Otherwise, on that day, the other prisoners would go without. That's
why, in spite of the pain, and of being knocked down, you had to grit your teeth, hold
the boxes under your arms and your hands as high up as possible. And if ever, in the gene-
ral panic, you went back to the wrong door, you were in for it; they would beat you
until they crippled you, accusing you of trying to communicate with the others. And since the hundred or so black, closed doors all looked alike, and you were running with your head down, who on earth could recognize his own door straight away?

« Besides the brutality that accompanied food distribution, we were subjected to other brutal acts at all hours of the day or night on the part of the strong-arm men, just because they happened to feel like it.»

Not to speak of water, or quick-lime........

« Water is rationed. We had friends who told us that they had washed in their own urine, that they had been obliged to drink their own urine... If a prisoner asked for a second helping of rice, then the repression started. In front of every tiger-cage there is a special receptacle containing lime which the Kapos throw at political prisoners, burning their skin with it. They also use vomit and tear-gas grenades. Then, when the prisoners are almost unconscious in their cells, they enter and start hitting or handcuffing them -- in a very special way, with their hands tied behind their backs ».

In 1970

In 1970, a delegation of American congressmen visited the island of Con-Son (Poulo-Condor). They found out what the old traditions of the place were: that they had always treated the prisoners worse than animals. The discovery of these cages, followed by publication of photographs showing endless lines of them, with the half-dead prisoners visible through the bars, gave rise to an immense campaign of protest. The decree announced by Thieu on July 21, 1970, promised that these methods would be abolished. Since then, little information has been made available. It is known, however, that the cages still exist, and that U.S. Aid (the civilian branch of American aid to the countries of the Third-World) has allocated to the Poulo-Condor penitentiary administration the sum of 400,000 dollars to be used for construction of 384 new cells (presumably more «modern» ones), and that a contract for them has been signed with an American firm, represented by the initials « R.M.K.B.R.J.»

The struggle continues

The best, most valid response that the victims of torture can give their torturers is to continue the struggle. And this is what they are doing in so far as they are able. From mere mutual support and the most elementary attempts to help one another, to far more sophisticated forms of action under the very eyes of the
torturers, everything tends to demonstrate that efforts to debase and dehumanize the prisoners are a failure. Many have told of the forms this struggle can take: an organized hunger strike in protest against bad food, or concerted yelling in spite of blows and increased repression that this brings on, in an attempt to make the guards give in, etc. For the prisoners, the simple fact of applying the term «enemy» to the prison guards and other personnel suffices to prove that the struggle can still be carried on inside the prison. It is not just a struggle for survival at any price; if this were the case it would be easy to recant. It is a struggle against the prison and the authorities, from inside the penitentiary system itself. It helps too to convince prisoners who are less sure of themselves, and encourages them to join the battle.

Prisoners and cells are also battle-fields, and the prisoners are combattants. These shadows of men, though tortured and beaten, still appear to be invincible; while the Americans (who not only condone but organize and control this system), together with their lackeys in Saigon, have lost the war here as well.
FROM AMERICAN STRATEGY TO LIQUIDATION
OF THE PRISONERS

Repression and American Strategy

In Thieu's country, whether it be politics, administration, the police or justice all public activities converge toward repression. What remains of the «democratic principles» to which, at first, it had been preferable to refer, in order to get the U.S. to «buy» the country? What remains of the multiplicity of parties that were needed to put on a good front for liberal Europe, or of the separation of powers, so dear to the French? Thieu's representatives in foreign countries, especially when speaking on television, display their attachment to freedom. But today the government apparatus in its entirety functions in the service of repression.

To start with, the anti-communism written into the Constitution and the régime's total dependence on American imperialism. Today, except in a minor way, it is no longer a question of military dependence, strictly speaking. Imperialism has destroyed the entire economy, the society and the daily life-style of the Vietnamese. U.S. penetration is evident in the very details of the repressive apparatus, and not only in juxtaposition to it or as its model. In reality, for several years, throughout Indochina, American strategy has aimed at coordinating the B52 raids, which sow collective death and destruction of nature, with repression of the individual, which kills militants and fills the refugee camps. Electronic devices that profit multinational firms reign over automated battle-fields in the same way that they do when an entire people is identified on computerized punch-cards.

An example: the «Phœnix Program», or «death-bird»

This is a very important feature of the repressive apparatus, one that has existed since 1968, as part of the «Vietnamization» of the war. Officially Vietnamese
although this program failed to dismantle the NLF political structure, it has in fact widely contributed to filling the prisons and to placing the population under Saigon’s control. In its general conception, its financing, even in the details of its functioning, it gives evidence of U.S. domination of the Thieu system. A precise account of the origin and development of the operation, by a former member of the State Department, Wayne Cooper, appeared in the Washington Post, dated June 8, 1972.

Of course, the police and torture manpower is, for the most part, Vietnamese. But the program was completely created, organized and financed by the C.I.A. before it was included in the Saigon system. Even the terms used to designate the objectives underline this fact: if the Phoenix program is meant to «neutralize» the NLF apparatus, and not to «eliminate» it, this indicates that the latter word was considered to be a little too crude and would have shocked American Congressmen; it was necessary to soften the term. The methods too, come from the industrial mega-machine: the system of identifying suspects by having an information card-file for each city inhabitant and, in so far as possible, for the countryside as well, was conceived by Americans and approved by the American authorities. Informers are paid with U.S. funds: «American tax-payers’ dollars have permitted the development of the police and of para-military units that arrest suspects» (U.S. Congressional committee, July 1971).

Finally, the local echelons of the program that handles police round-ups, individual arrests and interrogations, must furnish a quota of «neutralized» Viet-Cong, and this quota is set by the American authorities. Between 1968 and 1971, 22,360 responsible militants were said to have been neutralized in this way, in addition to 17,000, which was the figure for 1971-1972. A former information officer, K.B. Osborn, made this statement in October 1972: «Personally, in a year and a half, I knew of no one who, having been held as a Viet Cong suspect, survived the interrogation.»

« Undesirable elements must be exterminated 
(Thieu, 10.24.1972)

In some one thousand prisons and detention camps in South Vietnam, opponents of every shade, but also people arrested during round-ups, which are often gigantic in size, are today in danger of death.

Undoubtedly this danger has always existed, but this time the massacre may be greater than anything the Vietnamese prisons have witnessed in these last years. Because for once, we must believe Thieu, take him at his word when, on October 24, 1972, he announced that all «unsatisfactory elements» should be exterminated. We must believe him all the more readily since reports of massacres and of «disappearances» of prisoners are reaching us from different sources; also because massacres of this kind have already taken place (after the Geneva Accords of 1954.)

It has been mentioned before that many prisoners who have been systematically undernourished, deprived of the most elementary care, horribly tortured and weakened by years of imprisonment, have already died. There have been, in addition, constant
collective repressions, beatings and shootings.

A tradition of collective massacre: liquidation has started

At Poulo-Condor

50 persons were seriously wounded on May 4, 1971; 30 more on September 9, 1972.

At Phu-Cuoc

- in 1971, 147 prisoners were killed during 13 «sessions»;
- on Feb. 14, 1972, 7 persons were killed and 14 wounded in section A, 10;
- on May 8, 1972, 148 were wounded by machine-gun fire in section 88;
- on Sept. 12, 1972, 200 were killed and wounded in section C.7;
- on Oct. 11, 1972, several dozen prisoners were killed and wounded on the pretext that they were trying to escape while collecting wood (obligatory wood collection was often demanded by the French during the Algerian war).

At Chi Hoa

10 prisoners who were brutally beaten with clubs and iron bars on Oct. 22, 1972, are in serious condition. Shortly after, a new director arrived at the prison, the sinister Colonel Nguyen Van Vé who was notorious when he worked at Poulo-Condor. Since his arrival, he is said to have organized the «departure» of numerous political prisoners. These departures are deeply disturbing, for certain convoys have not arrived at their announced destination... In other cases, political prisoners who were told that they were being liberated (a year, sometimes two years, having passed since the end of their terms) were transferred to other prisons.

During recent months, shootings and brutal treatment have thus increased as the date for signing the January accords approached.

If these prisoners were freed, what would they not have to tell about the violence and the massacres, concerning which we already know the broad lines? Their accounts would incriminate Thieu all the more in that many of these men and women are neither communists nor communist sympathizers; in certain cases, they belong to the Saigon-bourgeoisie, and their testimony could hardly be labelled «communist propaganda»...
But suppose they are not freed? Thieu has foreseen this possibility; this mass of his victims must not be able either to testify against his régime or to participate in the reconstruction of tomorrow’s free Vietnam.

This is why the process of liquidation is going ahead. The techniques are simple: prisoners who have gotten to know one another during their incarceration are separated and allocated to other centers. There they can be mixed with common criminals and their identity papers can be falsified to prevent their liberation. Better still; as a result of this change, their families lose trace of them. In many centers, in any case, family visits have been discontinued since the end of December. Separated from their comrades and cut off from their families, many prisoners who possess only false identity papers, are in danger of being put to death.

What has become of Madame Nguyen Thi Binh’s brother, Nguyen Dong Ha? What has become of the child his wife gave birth to in Thu Duc prison, the child that was taken away by the police? Nor is anything known about the 26 students (among them the president of the Vietnamese Student Association) who undertook a hunger strike on December 10, 1972, at Chi Hoa. Nothing has been heard from them since December 26, the day they were taken away on stretchers. Their destination was the tiger-cages in Poulo-Condor and with them were 53 prisoners who, having already spent several years in Poulo-Condor, were being returned there, their legs and joints paralyzed, frequently leprous, tubercular ....

All of our apprehensions are justified. For instance, we have just learned of the death in prison of the Buddhist leader, Thich Tien Hoa. And although we occasionally receive information from the more important prisons, such as Chi Hoa, or from the large camps (there are 28,000 prisoners on Phu Cuoc island), we hear nothing from the numerous small and less known provincial centers. This isolation makes it easier to carry out the liquidation plan that was announced and is being carried out by Thieu.

OVER 300,000 PRISONERS.
HOW CAN WE SAVE THEM?

We must act quickly. Every day that passes makes it easier to proceed with the liquidation that has started. Each moment of silence favors the secret nature of these camps at the same time that it spreads a pall of oblivion over the horrors they conceal.

Indeed, just now, information is only trickling through. The press is more concerned with the diplomatic and military problems of applying the Paris Accords than it is with the prisons and the prisoners in them. Must we, as in 1945, wait for the return of a few survivors before public opinion becomes aroused, before it discovers the crimes of the system and the responsibilities of those who have instituted it and ensure its functioning? At all costs, we must make the facts known, we must seek out and compare all sources of information. We must alert public opinion.
Fortunately, the authors of the present pamphlet are not alone. Well-known members of the French Resistance during World War II, as well as former deportees, have expressed their indignation (Le Monde, Jan. 26, 1973). Important French political groups and numerous religious and humanitarian organizations have urged that no stone be left unturned... «to stop the repression in South Vietnam».

On the international level, Amnesty International was one of the first movements to expose, with supporting proof, the situation of these prisoners and the dangers that threaten them. The International Association of Democratic Jurists has published a pamphlet on the subject, and the International Federation for Human rights has expressed its deep concern. Finally, in January, 1973, an International Committee for the Release of Prisoners in South Vietnam was formed through the cooperation of a broad spectrum of social, religious and political organizations in several countries, (one of its co-directors, Don Luce, was in fact, the first journalist to report on the tiger-cages).

But there are not enough of us. Only the pressure of all revolutionary forces, all democratic forces, all parties and movements, and especially of the governments that expressed their indignation about the Christmas 1972 bombings, can influence Thieu, as well as Nixon, whose responsibility for these crimes is enormous. We must remind those who refuse to speak up that their silence risks making them accomplices. We must show those who take refuge in pseudo-neutrality, or in a self-serving recourse to the excuse of «lack of information», or in the fiction that it is now «the Vietnamese themselves» who will settle these questions, how great are Nixon’s responsibilities. We must continue to expose the truth concerning the Thieu régime. We must demand application of article 11 of the Accords, which provides that «immediately after the cease-fire enters into effect», democratic freedoms and particularly individual freedom, will be restored (which is obviously incompatible with the continued imprisonment of even one civilian detainee).

We must harass both Thieu and Nixon, insist that the International Control Commission take a stand on this question; that the names of the prisoners be made public, in order that they may be placed individually and collectively under our protection:

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On the invitation of this committee, in addition to the above organizations, over 100 groups from many countries sent representatives to a Congress held in Paris on April 12, 13, 14, 1973, to adopt a common program of action. Documentation may be had by writing to: 18 rue du Cardinal Lemoine, Paris 5, or to 122 W. Franklin Ave. Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55404, U.S.A.
Those who might be tempted to follow the example of the Bolivian Newspaper *Ultima Hora* must be urged to speak out. This paper justified its refusal to intervene on behalf of Brazilian prisoners by declaring that «the decision to assassinate or not to assassinate these political prisoners is a decision that strictly concerns our neighbor country » (quoted in *Le Monde, Nov 5, 1972*). In South Vietnam, more than elsewhere, because of what the Vietnamese revolution represents in the eyes of the entire world, this «decision» concerns us all.
APPENDIX

Much of the material used in this pamphlet was collected before the signing of the January 27 Accords. It is obviously not exhaustive, for volumes would be needed adequately to expose Thieu's criminal régime, as well as the political, judicial and police mechanisms spawned by such intensive imperialist corruption. At the least, we have made an effort here to use and confront with one another various sources of information:

- «Information Bulletins» of the P.R.G. (Paris)
- Pamphlets edited by the Vietnamese Catholic Community in Paris: particularly,

The «International Conference of Christians in Fellowship with the Vietnamese, the Laotian and the Cambodian Peoples» (Québec, Oct. 6-9, 1972) made public a certain number of texts and messages.

The U.S. «Anti-war Movement» has furnished important information which has been collected in a volume signed by Holmes Brown and Don Luce entitled, «Hostages of War, Saigon's Political Prisoners», published by the Indochina Mobile Project (Washington). The best source for a description of the Saigon national police is an American publication, the «Military Review» (June 1971, No 51).

The French «International Center for Denunciation of War Crimes in Vietnam» has published detailed communiqués on Thieu's attempts to «liquidate» these prisoners. Finally, in early 1973, two young Frenchmen, J.-P. Debris and A. Menras, who during a period of alternate military service in South Vietnam, were imprisoned in Chi Hoa for more than two years for having raised the NLF flag, have exposed on several occasions, the atrocities they witnessed, as well as the procedures indicating that a general massacre of the prisoners is already under way.
# Table of Contents

1. The Prisoners and the Accords of January 27, 1973. 4

2. Thieu and the Saigon Political System. 11

3. The Repressive Apparatus in South Vietnam. 17

4. Torture. 27

5. From U.S. Strategy to Liquidation of the Prisoners. 40

How can we save them?
The translators ask your indulgence for the inevitable errors that beset foreign language printing and which could not be corrected owing to the urgency of the problem and to the consequent need to publish quickly.
THE UNITED STATES HOLDS NO PRISONERS

How often we were reminded that this was United States policy! But what actually was done with the captured "enemy" soldiers and partisan fighters? The village leaders, the bombed-out refugees, the political opponents?

Many were shot, some were dropped from helicopters, the majority were «turned over» to the ARVN. The more fortunate refugees were parked in concentration camps, others were drowned. Finally, the most feared, among them the so-called Third Force opposition—were arbitrarily imprisoned, but ask the Vietnam veterans: they know.

The January 27, 1973 Accords have begun to right some of the more classic wrongs of war, particularly as regards the actual combatants. However, they contain no specific provision, other than that of good-will, for liberation of the hundreds of thousands of political prisoners still being held—their very existence denied—and, to make matters worse, the Thieu government with the complicity of the U.S. government, is not honoring the Accords.

The present pamphlet is an in-depth study, made by a group of French University professors, of the legal and social context in which Nguyen Van Thieu, with the full financial and moral support of the United States, continues to hold these men, women, even children, in numerous prisons throughout Vietnam.

Thieu’s denials and Nixon’s silence, make it all the more urgent that

THE TRUTH SHOULD BE KNOWN

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